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CAMBODIA: FROM KILLING FIELDS TO
FIELD OF DREAMS

by

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
DISCLAIMER	ii
PREFACE	iv
ABSTRACT	viii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE	5
Early Cambodia.....	6
The Pol Pot Years.....	9
Pre UNTAC Concerns.....	12
A Special and Unique Concern...Land Mines	13
UNTAC ARRIVES.....	19
Who Was UNTAC?	20
The UNTAC Charter	21
UNTAC's Scorecard	24
CAMBODIA TODAY	32
Big Picture Successes and Failures	34
Modern Social Consequences	36
Today's Cambodian Reality	41
CONCLUSION.....	46
GLOSSARY	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY	56

Preface

I choose Cambodia as my research project for two main reasons. First, the subject of Cambodia, and Cambodia as a country, interests me personally. I served in two different capacities with the United Nations Transitional Authority, Cambodia or UNTAC from late 1992 to late 1993. My first assignment there was about four hours by road southwest of Phnom Penh, down the only good highway in Cambodia, Highway 4, popularly known as the “Khmer-American Highway.” I was a team leader in bandit populated Koh Kong Province, in the district of Sre Amble. This part of the country, as well as the area around Pailin in Battambang province, and the entire province of Kompong Thom, still remain the most active Khmer Rouge strongholds and havens in Cambodia during the time of the UNTAC mission. During my tour of duty as a United Nations Military Observer or UNMO, I had the opportunity to personally meet with the Khmer Rouge soldiers and leaders on six separate “in the jungle” meetings. One of these meetings about 85 kilometers north of Sre Amble turned into a hostage or capture situation. My patrol of 15 French Foreign Legionnaire soldiers, an Australian radio operator, a British Petty Officer, and I were “detained” at gunpoint for over 10 hours by a group of over 20 Khmer Rouge soldiers. My negotiation skills allowed us to not extend our stay past the 10-hour point. Additionally, while in Sre Amble, two Khmer Rouge Brigadier Generals lived in a United Nations sanctioned “liaison officers’ camp” near our team location. I met with these Khmer Rouge officers daily for almost six months. We discussed many things in

addition to their favorite subject of the “Paris Peace Accords” and how the Khmer Rouge upheld them and the rest of everyone in Cambodia continuously violated them. An ANKI Major and a CPP Captain also lived with the two Khmer Rouge Generals, in apparent harmony, or rather a tolerated acceptance of each other. The Khmer Rouge liaison officers proved to be valuable sources of information and liaison with deployed Khmer Rouge soldiers in the jungle. By using hand-held VHF radios, my team was able to meet with many deployed Khmer Rouge troops through meetings arranged by these liaison officers.

My second in country assignment was as the Sector Commander of Sector 5 West, Kompong Thom Province, located in Kompong Thom provincial town. This area was still a very active Khmer Rouge stronghold in 1993. Several additional hostage situations occurred concerning United Nations soldiers and United Nations Military Observers in this province. Being selected as a Sector Commander was a great honor and a great responsibility. In this capacity, I had over 40 UNMOs from 25 different countries under my command. It was an extremely exciting assignment.

My second reason for writing about Cambodia is that there is simply not a lot of current information or interest in this country. The signing of The Paris Peace Agreements in 1991, the UNTAC sponsored elections in 1993, and the upcoming Cambodian administered elections in 1998, are all stepping stones to democracy in Cambodia. The elections in 1998 will again usher in the worldwide attention of the recent UNTAC era.

This paper is for those who served in Cambodia and for the people of Cambodia.

I would like to especially thank all the United Nations Military Observers, my fellow UNMOs, who served with me during the most demanding and interesting assignment in my 24-year career. They know who they are, and hopefully they will recognize their accomplishments in this paper.

I would also like to thank Dr. Lawrence E. “Buck” Grinter for his patience and assistance. When I first spoke to him about being my advisor for this paper, I “warned” him that this was my first thesis attempt. I feel he too knows what it is like to now be held as a hostage. Dr. Grinter, you will be set free of this hostage situation on 1 April 1997.

I owe special thanks my wife Anna, my daughter Michelle, and my son Tom. They now know more about Cambodia than they ever cared to know about any country. Without their proofreading and computer technical assistance, this paper would not have been possible.

Having never written a paper of any length or substance before, there were times when I honestly thought it was an overwhelming task. When these times came, I turned for help, friendship and inspiration to a very special friend in my life, Dr. Abby Maria Lane, “Abby.” This paper and the hours I spent over it are dedicated to you Abby. A lot of what formulated my thoughts for this paper were things that happened to me or I witnessed first hand. Things like death, mine fields, mine victims, sniper, artillery, and mortar fire. A lot of things I witnessed as an *air soldier* at 42 years of age. I found out fear is no respecter of age, not at all. Abby helped listen to me and heard my fears as I wrote and thought about what I saw. Without her, this paper would not have been possible. I dedicate this paper to you Abby. “Thanks” is not enough to express what I

feel for your inspiration, help, and friendship, but anyway, you know what I mean, so “thanks.”

Finally, I would like to make an observation about using primary research on the Internet. During my research, I amassed a very good assortment of people I thought would be valuable sources of “Primary Research” and who could be contacted through E-mail on the Internet. Overall, I did get some valuable responses, but I also received some non-answers and some very disappointing replies, and some just useless diatribe that served only to allow the sender to vent their spleen. My many numerous, carefully worded, and detailed questions were in many cases unfortunately answered, if at all, with one line replies, or not at all. Additionally, several noted “dissidents,” who shall remain nameless, attempted to use my questions as a lightning rod to further grind their own political axes against US policy in any general direction, often totally unrelated to the country of Cambodia. Some of these “E-mail battles” were conducted from as far away as Paris. Some involved United Nations administrators who actually participated in the United Nations mission in Cambodia. So although I did get some useful information, using the Internet best allowed me to correspond with fellow UNMOs on some questions. Therefore, my intention of gathering first hand accounts and very new information, or the newest information about the situation in Cambodia did not actually come to fruition. So in conclusion, this is just an Internet, “Primary Research” observation on my part.

So Cambodia, you now have several events awaiting your active participation. First, your next “free and fair” elections of 1998. Next, your inclusion into ASEAN, along with Laos and Myanmar—your long awaited package deal. So for now and for the immediate future anyway, the eyes of the world will once again be upon you.

Abstract

Although the Paris Peace Accords of October 1991 opened the way for peace in Cambodia, the country has always “enjoyed” a violent history. As a small country, about the size of the state of Missouri, a lot of news or information about Cambodia does not surface. What does occasionally make the news is the fact that the Khmer Rouge are still actively doing something in the country, the country best known as the “Killing Fields.”

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Unfortunately, the Khmer Rouge are still active, but misfortune is not new to Cambodia. Although the Khmer Rouge let the world know they opposed the 1993 elections by sporadic violence, they were unsuccessful in preventing the 1993 elections. The elections saw almost 90 percent of the voter eligible population vote. However, some holdout Khmer Rouge, as of March 1997, still maintain control of the north central part of the country as their own stronghold, with the temple complex at Anlong Veng as their official capital. How will the Khmer Rouge, both those who surrendered and the holdouts, fit into Cambodia in the future? In August 1993 the Khmer Rouge also experienced an internal fracture in their own ranks. Many hundreds of staunch Khmer Rouge soldiers decided to accept a negotiated amnesty with the bipartisan CPP and FUNCINPEC coalition government. How this will affect the future of Cambodia, not only politically but also socially, is for now uncertain.

The future success of Cambodia lies in social and economic development along with world acceptance and recognition of a credible Cambodian democracy.

Chapter 1

Introduction

As Cambodia entered the 1990s, the likelihood of forming an enduring democratic government was minuscule according to any theory of democratic formation.

—Nhan T. Vu

Until the Paris Peace Agreement¹ was signed on 21 October 1991, Cambodia was virtually ignored by rest of the world. Paradoxically, talk of the United Nations going into Cambodia in 1992 to conduct an election seemed to captivate the entire world. After all, Cambodia had not witnessed a “free and fair”² election for over 20 years. To the world in general, Cambodia meant the “Killing Fields,” “Pol Pot,” the “Khmer Rouge,” a closed and a horrific society no one had heard about for years. However, with the signing of the Paris Accords, the arrival of the United Nations, and the 1993 elections, Cambodia was suddenly back on the map and being talked about on the news again.

This paper will first look at an introductory history of Cambodia. The first chapter will cover early Cambodia, through the Pol Pot years and UNTAC presence, with final special coverage on landmines. Landmines are critical to the past, present, and most importantly the future of Cambodia. There are currently over 10 million active landmines throughout the country.³ This historical introduction will set the stage for the arrival of the United Nations Transitional Authority, Cambodia, or UNTAC.

First and foremost, UNTAC was a unique operation. Unique surely, in that only 50 United States military personnel were involved in the UNTAC operation. All 50 participated as United Nations Military Observers, or UNMOs. The 50 UNMOs came from all branches of the US military. Informally, many consider UNTAC to be the crown jewel of Peacekeeping Operations. However, like real jewels, UNTAC came with a huge price tag, well over \$2 billion when completed. The election “jewel” in the crown was to be Cambodia’s stepping-stone to democracy.

This paper will look at the possibility of 22,000 military Peacekeepers, civilian police, and United Nations Civil Administrators bringing democracy to one of the poorest nations in the entire world. In assessing UNTAC’s charter, it is my proposition that Cambodia has been pointed in the direction of the “Field of Dreams.” A “Field of Dreams” when compared to the devastation suffered there during the regime of the “Killing Fields” in the last half of the 1970s. I view this Field of Dreams as the evolving democracy of Cambodia, a democracy struggling to also simultaneously combat the corruption of a newly developing society. And concerning the United Nations, no, the UNTAC scorecard was not perfect. However, on average, many “above par” scores were found in its charter. On the whole, the most successful UN operation to date was the UNTAC operation.

This paper will also briefly cover pertinent geographical features, the ancient past, and the present history up to the departure of the United Nations Transitional Authority, Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1993. It will then see where Cambodia is today, including its successes and failures, the status of its present democracy, and where it is headed in the future.

Lastly, this paper will examine Cambodia today. Both successes and failures will be looked at in this paper. Cambodia has been propelled into development with its own set of modern social consequences.⁴ Among these consequences are a flourishing money laundering network, prostitution rings, and a newly found drug culture. Did the United Nations contribute to these social ills? This analysis will show that it did point Cambodia into a morally corrupt direction, but that direction may be considered inevitable in today's world order. Finally, it will conclude with where Cambodia is heading. These conclusions will be from first hand observations and an analysis of current thinking on Cambodia.

Notes

¹Throughout this paper, the reader will see mention of "The Paris Peace Accord" and "The Paris Peace Agreement(s)." Different authors use these descriptions interchangeably. The more correct term is "Paris Peace Agreements." I have chosen not to edit out one form over the other. They are used in this paper as they appeared in references cited.

²Nhan T. Vu, "The Cambodian Elections and the Benefits of Legitimacy," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 20, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1996): 99. In this article, Vu notes, "Unless otherwise stated, in this paper the word 'elections' refers to elections that are 'free and fair,' a specialized term in international law denoting an election that substantially represents the will of the people."

³During the March 1997 Air War College visit to Cambodia, some new information about landmines was discussed. This new information points to the fact that there may be "only" one million land mines in Cambodia to contend with. These discussions were held with representatives from the International Relations Department, Ministry of National Defense.

⁴Reuters news reported on 23 December 1996 that Cambodia's first demographic study in more than three decades revealed that the country's population is overwhelmingly young, rural, and without basic household amenities.

The Demographic Survey of Cambodia, which estimated the population at 10.7 million, found that half of Cambodians are under age 18, more than 80 percent work on farms and only six percent have electricity, toilets, or running water.

Decades of war have taken their toll on the population, with every fourth household being headed by a woman, who make up just over 52 percent of the population, the survey found.

Notes

The survey is the first since 1962, when the last census was held. That census has since been rendered meaningless by years of instability, including the brutal 1975-1979 Khmer Rouge regime that left more than one million Cambodians dead through execution, malnutrition, disease, and overwork.

The Demographic Society, which is regarded as a first glimpse at Cambodia before a national census planned for 1998, provides the first modern snapshot of Cambodia's people, officials said.

Conducted by the Planning Ministry with support from the United Nations Planning Fund, it studied more than 20,000 households in March of this year, Minister of Planning Chea Chanto said.

He cited the high annual birth rate of 38 per 1,000 population and lack of basic household amenities as causes for concern.

"These and other factors brought out by the survey will be very useful in...drawing welfare measures, particularly for our women and children," he said.

More than 92 percent of households use firewood as fuel for cooking, and 82 percent rely on kerosene for lighting. About seven in ten households, which average more than five people, live in just one room, the survey found.

Also worrisome, said officials, is that the average Cambodian completes less than four years in school, with 10 percent of children working.

Only 30 percent of children over age seven are in school, yet the survey estimated that 81 percent of men and 58 percent of women attain basic literacy.

Chapter 2

Historical Perspective

Cambodia has risen from the ashes, but the embers still smolder. The survivors cling to a precarious stability. What has been their ordeal? How have they recovered? What prospects do Cambodians have for a peaceful, prosperous existence?

—Marlowe Hood and David A. Albin

David Chandler, in *A History of Cambodia* writes, “No one knows for certain how long people have lived in what is now Cambodia,¹ where they came from, or what languages they spoke before writing was introduced, using an Indian-style alphabet, around the third century AD. Carbon-14 dates from a cave at Laang Spean in northwestern Cambodia, however, suggest that people who knew how to make pots lived in the cave as early as 4200 BC.”²

Cambodia has always “enjoyed” or, more vividly, experienced a violent history. The relative calm since 1979 cannot compensate for the preceding decades of terror.³ Although not unique to Cambodia, both its past history and present history are equally unsettled. In order to appreciate how the influence of vast amounts of outside help, especially from the United Nations, affected Cambodia, a little of the history of the country must first be understood.

Most recently remembered as a part of French Indochina and reminiscent of scenes depicting the “Ugly American,” “A Street Without Joy,” and Richard Nixon assuring

evening television audiences that we were not really bombing Cambodia, the history of the country goes back over 4000 years.

Early Cambodia

Monsoon rains added to the misery. During the sweltering 100-degree plus days in the summer, the red dust, indigenous to Con Thien [and to all dry areas of Cambodia too] clogged men's [the Peacekeepers] nostrils and throats. Now, with the arrival of the torrential downpours, the reddish dust became quagmires of knee-deep mud that could suck a Marine's boondockers [Peacekeepers' boots] off. However the oozing mire did possess one advantage. When enemy [Khmer Rouge] shells buried in the mud less shrapnel dispersed.

—Al Hemingway

From a geographic and demographic standpoint, Cambodia is a small country, about the size of Wales and England combined or about half the size of Italy or Vietnam. The comparison to Vietnam is relevant because Cambodia has shared a lot of its violent co-existence with Vietnam. Territorial boundaries have shifted at times throughout the history of what was popularly known as French Indochina. Comparing the country to the United States, Cambodia is about the size of Missouri. Replace Jefferson City, the capitol of Missouri, with Phnom Penh, the Capitol City of Cambodia, for easy reference. Surrounded by Vietnam on the east and south, Laos, and Thailand on the north and west, Cambodia has a natural western boundary of the Gulf of Thailand. The main distinguishing feature of the country is the large freshwater lake, known as the Tonle Sap or “The Great Lake.” When the monsoon rains and snow melt from the Himalayan mountains reversing the flow of the Mekong River, the Tonle Sap floods, affecting about 75 percent of the Cambodian landmass.⁴

The Mekong River flows for over 1500 kilometers through Cambodia, passing through Phnom Penh, where it branches off with the Bassiac River on its dry season south to north course. The course of the river's flow is reversed during the wet monsoon.

The Mekong River provides a vital transportation link in the country. Geographically, if you are in the northwestern part of the country, you may be faced with long periods of travel due to the lack of roads and any natural means to cross the countryside. Although mostly a fertile lowland, the western part of the country is dominated by the Elephant and Cardamon mountains. Three immediate observations must be recognized about Cambodia's demography.

First, Cambodia has a very small population compared to most of its neighbors. Second, Cambodia has a relatively favorable land to labor ratio. On average, there are fewer than two people per hectare of arable land, in contrast to nine in Vietnam and more than three in Thailand. These two facts combined help explain the constant pressure Cambodia has experienced on both its eastern and western borders. Finally, because Cambodia's population actually declined in the 1970's, it has major distortions in age and sex groupings. The willful extermination on the part of the Khmer Rouge directly influenced the stated numbers.⁵

In touching upon a few points of Cambodian history, emphasis must be placed on things that still resonate today. The country known today as Cambodia has a record of being occupied by people for the past 4000 years. Although little is known of the early pre-written history, actual written records were made beginning in the third century. This period was known as the "Hunan" period and prosperity was based on trade and agriculture. The Hunan Empire survived until the end of the sixth century. In the later Angkorian era, beginning in the 8th century, events transformed the kingdom into an artistic and religious power.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the expanding Kingdom of Siam (Thailand) launched repeated attacks against Cambodia, finally capturing the capitol Angkor Thom in 1431. The vanquished Khmers tried to reestablish the royal court on the site of the modern capitol, Phnom Penh, but were forced to relocate several times as they retreated from further military incursions. At the end of the sixteenth century, with most of the royal family in exile, the Siamese enthroned a Khmer prince as their vassal. Thus began the humiliating practice whereby Khmer monarchs were installed by a foreign power—either Siam, Vietnam, or France. In 1794, for example, the Khmer kingship was actually bestowed in Bangkok.⁶

Dynastic rivalries, continual warfare, massacres, weak kings, and gunboat diplomacy reigned until the mid 1800s. From then until 1940, under French colonial rule, a relatively peaceful period was experienced. In 1941, in the assumption that he would prove suitably pliable, the French installed 19-year-old Prince Norodom Sihanouk on the Cambodian throne. This move backfired on the French. French colonial power quickly waned and toward the end of the First Indochina War Cambodia proclaimed independence in 1953. Prince Sihanouk, now turned King Sihanouk, dominated national politics in Cambodia for the next 15 years before being overthrown by his own army.

Author William Shawcross describes Norodom Sihanouk as follows:

[He] presided feudally over Cambodia from 1941 to 1970, as King, Chief of State, Prince, Prime Minister, head of the main political movement, jazz band leader, magazine editor, film director and gambling concessionaire, attempting to unite in his rule the unfamiliar concepts of Buddhism, socialism and democracy. His exercise of power was so astonishing and so individual that he came to personify his country and its policies, abroad as well as at home.”⁷

However, all do not happen to agree with Shawcross when describing Sihanouk. Lieutenant General Phillip B. Davidson, describes Sihanouk during the Cambodian incursion of April-May 1975:

Among the characters and bona fide eccentrics who peopled the Indochina wars, Sihanouk stands out. He was a king who elected to lead Cambodia as a commoner. He was a so-so painter, a fair jazz saxophonist, and an untalented thespian who directed, acted in, and produced his own bad movies. In foreign affairs he attempted to walk the icy tightrope between China and North Vietnam on one side and the United States on the other.⁸

These two divergent character descriptions further add to the mystique of trying to understand Cambodia as a country.

The Pol Pot Years

Keeping you is no profit, losing you is no loss.

—Khmer Rouge Saying

Kill Them All.

—Anonymous

Beginning in the late 1960's, and lasting into the early 1970's, the United States unofficially, secretly, and yet, in reality, openly carpet-bombed Cambodia with B-52s. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed throughout Cambodia, in the hope of eradicating the communist guerrillas and their military sanctuaries. The red Khmers or "Khmer Rouge" were pushed farther into the interior and border areas of the country. However, when the United States abandoned the Vietnam effort in 1975, the Khmer Rouge stormed Phnom Penh and cut off the entire country from the world's media. It is estimated the Khmer Rouge systematically killed one to three million Khmer citizens, especially those appearing to be educated. The most commonly accepted number killed

under the Khmer Rouge is two million. But numerically, especially when describing the death of fellow humans, when does disaster “officially” become disaster?⁹

One of the darkest periods in history of any country began in Cambodia on 17 April 1975 and did not end until 7 January 1979. These were the years of the Khmer Rouge—the Pol Pot years. The outside world could not see what happened during the secretive years of Khmer Rouge rule. However, when the world saw Cambodia in the movie “The Killing Fields,” it did not and could not believe what it saw. Not since the Nazi concentration camps of World War II had such atrocities been heaped upon a population. Perhaps worse than the Nazis was the undisputed fact that the Khmer Rouge inflicted the death typified by “The Killing Fields” upon their own society. Khmers were actually killing their fellow Khmers. There was not one killing field in Cambodia—there were dozens of massacre sites throughout the country. The sheer number of these killing sites rendered the entire country of Cambodia one “Killing Field unto itself.

Pol Pot is generally considered responsible for the devastation of the country. Born in provincial town of Kompong Thom in 1928, Saloth Sar, (more commonly known as Pol Pot) was a Cambodian guerrilla commander and political leader. It is said that as early as the beginning 1960’s Pol Pot retreated to the jungles of Cambodia’s countryside after having been educated in Paris. When Lon Nol was overthrown in 1970, Pol Pot and his followers quickly moved in, emptying the cities and relocating to the countryside those not killed.

Life was hard everywhere. On a conservative scale it is estimated that one in seven died as a result of the Khmer Rouge policies. Tactics included overworking people, neglecting or mistreating the sick, and giving everyone less food than they needed to

survive. Perhaps on day one of the regime, as many as 100,000 were killed outright as enemies of the Angkor revolution.¹⁰

Author David Chandler, in *A History of Cambodia*, says,

The Khmer Rouge period can be divided into four phases. The first lasted from the capture of Phnom Penh in April 1975 until the beginning of 1976, when a constitution was proclaimed and a new wave of migration was set in motion. During this period the peoples only hope for rescue or salvation were the clandestine radio broadcasts out of Phnom Penh. The second phase lasted until September 1976. The prominent activity during this phase was the radical behavior from a mixture of individuals in the new government. The mixture included those who studied in France (Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, Sary's wife Ieng Thirith, Hu Nim, Thiounn Thioenn, and Son Sen) and younger militants who had never left Cambodia (Vorn Vet, Khek Pen, and Chhim Samauk). The third phase was marked by additional purges and by a shift toward blaming Cambodia's difficulties and counterrevolutionary activity on Vietnam. The fourth phase of Khmer Rouge activity was marked by a Vietnamese military offensive against Cambodia. Interestingly, one of the exiles of the Khmer Rouge rule, Hun Sen, previously fled Cambodia in 1977. He emerged from this blood bath as the premier of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) in mid-1980. (Today, Hun Sen is half of the 1993 UNTAC elected leadership of Cambodia.) January 7, 1979 saw the Khmer Rouge overthrown from Phnom Penh and pushed northwest to Battambang Province where they established their capitol in Pailin. This area still remains their traditional stronghold, headquarters, and Capitol City. Today, the Khmer Rouge finances their cause and their army by selling rubies and teakwood from the surrounding jungle.¹¹

A sort of mystique also surrounds the exact number of Khmer Rouge now left remaining in Cambodia. As of March 1997, it is estimated that only 250-300 hard core guerrillas remain in the Anlong Veng area about 65 miles north of Siem Reap. This group is supposed to be headed by the one-legged butcher, Ta Mok. Currently, the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces have no concrete plans to rout this group. Since the area they are using, as their stronghold is a sacred temple complex, to fight there would be a desecration of sacred grounds.¹²

Pre UNTAC Concerns

In 1991, the United Nations realized Cambodia's readiness for peace among the four remaining semi-guerrilla warring factions. The first of the four factions signing the accord was the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC). FUNCINPEC was founded in support of Prince Sihanouk and drew upon forces that supported his government between 1954 and 1970. Having an armed force of about 10,000 strong, FUNCINPEC would go on to win 45 percent of the UNTAC election vote and 58 out of 120 seats in the Assembly during the 1993 elections. Next is the KPNLF, The Khmer People's National Liberation Front. Characterized as a conservative, middle class movement, KPNLF is heir to the 1960's republican opposition to Sihanouk. A third party affiliation, the Khmer Rouge, the party everyone has heard about by deed but does not really know anything about, is the Party of Democratic Kampuchea, popularly and simply known as the "DK." This Maoist-style guerrilla movement seized governmental power in 1975 and proceeded to forcibly ruralize the country by auto-genocide. Khmer Rouge troop strength has dwindled from a force of 30,000 in 1990 to approximately 10,000-15,000 in 1993 to about 6,000 using August 1996 figures of estimated Khmer Rouge defections and internal Khmer Rouge realignments. Lastly, the State of Cambodia (SOC) or the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), is the Communist regime installed in 1979 by Vietnam and first led by Heng Samrin, now led by Hun Sen. Called the People's Republic of Kampuchea before 1989, the CPP controlled, often by severe intimidation, 90 percent of the country at the time of the May 1993 elections. Military strength consists of approximately 40,000 regulars with 100,000 militia. The CPP won 38 percent of the May 1993 vote and 51 seats in the

Assembly.¹³ The signing of the Paris Peace Accords¹⁴ in October 1991 ended years of devastating civil war, and Cambodia started on the road to building a democratic society.

“By signing the Paris Peace Accords in 1991 and various international conventions in 1992, Cambodia’s leaders agreed to support a democratic resolution to the country’s long-standing civil war, to protect and advance human and political rights and fundamental freedoms for all Cambodians, and to begin rebuilding the country’s shattered economy and civil institutions.”¹⁵

A Special and Unique Concern...Land Mines

Yes, mines...walk through a minefield just once, and survive, and you will never be young again.

—Khmer Rouge Soldier Proverb

August 2, 1993. My operations officer is really excited. Word just came in that a United Nations Landcruiser was completely demolished by an antitank mine, on highway 5, just south of Siem Reap provincial town. One dead for sure, the other three passengers wounded. Minutes later I learn, a Navy Lieutenant is one of the wounded. He had only been in country two weeks. The American was driving the vehicle as it passed over the mine. The Captain from the Cameroon behind him was killed instantly—all limbs blown off along with his head. He never felt anything at all. A lot of Peacekeepers have already died in Cambodia in my 10 months here, but this is the first American casualty.

—The Author

They are in effect, mechanical soldiers, or as Cambodian government and resistance soldiers have called them, “eternal sentinels”—never sleeping, always ready to attack.

—Human Rights Watch

...I guess my feet just know where they want me to go...walking down a country road...

—James Taylor

To understand the current problems of Cambodia, one must remember it was essentially a closed society between the period 1975 to 1979. One continuing glaring problem that Cambodia faces, a problem acknowledged by the international community, is the land mine problem. This problem daily affects how all of Cambodian society functions.

Since the entire country lived as a closed society, the media was prohibited—there was no Cable News Network (CNN). Years after the fact, the world found out what really happened in Cambodia. A part of what happened was one of the world's largest carpeting of land mines. The Khmer Rouge made their own rules and formed their own law. In effect there was no law, especially concerning the use of land mines. *There is no record of how many or exactly where the mines were deployed.* There are estimates of between seven and nine million “active, live” land mines in Cambodia, where one of every 236 people is an amputee because of mine blasts.¹⁶ Further, conversations with veteran United Nation's Peacekeepers from Cambodia report many Khmers have one or both arms or legs gone in any combination of up to all four limbs.

Even today, the four Cambodian factions are still “peacefully at war” in Cambodia. This “calm but tense” situation is exacerbated by the use of land mines. Thousands of troops deployed millions of land mines, with no written or verbal record have where they were exactly emplaced or employed. One company of Khmer soldiers moves out of a sector they mined, leaving it uncleared. Another moves in and re-mines the already mined area. This continues and continues and no records exist of exact or even approximate locations or mine numbers. One cruel, but perhaps accurate thought from an

official for the U. N. High Commissioner for Refugees was, “Cambodia’s mines will be cleared by the people walking on them.”¹⁷

Even educating people to clear the mines is frustrating. James Brown, a deminer working for the organization Halo Trust said, “It is frustrating work. We worked in one area for six weeks and only found two mines but the Cambodian army assured us there were hundreds of mines there.”¹⁸ The author of this paper illustrates from his own personal experiences:

Add to these types of incidents the natural harshness of Cambodia. The thick jungle and the wet monsoon make mine clearing difficult. During rainy weather (which is half of the year), mines, especially the plastic antipersonnel mines, come out of hiding, forced by the heavy rains to migrate to new areas—areas perhaps that were never intended to be mined. Because of the way these new silent killers are manufactured, they persist in a climate like Cambodia’s. The act like small floating bombs in the monsoon rains, coming out of the ground and floating to a new location, to potentially kill where they were not intended to cause harm.

Missions, whose full time occupation is to clear the land mines from Cambodia, have severe problems too, both natural and bureaucratic. From 1993 until the present, the United Nations has been criticized for deploying too few resources for clearing the mines that infest the country.

The United Nations Transitional Authority, Cambodia (UNTAC) concentrated upon training Cambodians in the techniques of clearing mines so that there would be local personnel available to continue the work after the United Nations departed Cambodia. However, while these trained Cambodians continue to clear mines today, the pace of clearing land is agonizingly slow. To some extent this reflects the nature of the work and the magnitude of the problem—and the disheartening fact that mines are still being laid.¹⁹

Progress has been made worldwide dealing with the land mine situation. The progress Cambodia is making is a good example of success, although limited success. However, Cambodia and the whole world have a long way to go before this problem is

solved. On May 15, 1996, the Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC) reported that Cambodia had removed mines from 27,000 hectares of land in the past two and a half years, saving approximately 55,700 people from being disabled. “Mine clearance operations started in November 1993 have destroyed 55,700 antipersonnel mines, 375 antitank mines and 362,245 other explosive devices,” reported CMAC Director Sam Sotha. Sotha was speaking at an inauguration ceremony for a demining unit in Kompong Thom, one of Cambodia’s most heavily mined provinces. Poor roads and the security situation caused by a very active Khmer Rouge presence have delayed demining in Kompong Thom. At least progress is being made; tomorrow, maybe an enforceable law will be made too. As Judy Ledgerwood writes:

By signing the Paris Peace Accord in October 1991, Cambodia agreed to support a democratic resolution to the country’s long-standing civil war, to protect and advance human and political rights and fundamental freedoms for all Cambodians, and to begin rebuilding the country’s shattered economy and civil institutions. A fundamental tenant of meeting the intent of economic development coupled with public safety is clearing mines.²⁰

However, like all things concerning Cambodia, more mystery surrounds each topic, including “mines” than usually meets the eyes. During informal discussions with a high level Defense Ministry source, on 5 March 1997, at the International Relations Department Ministry of National Defense, new land mine numbers were quoted. He stated informally that the actual numbers of landmines in Cambodia could not be more than one million mines. He bases this estimate on undocumented records of mines that arrived from other countries. The source says that due to the records now available, the actual land mine problem is great, but not so bad as was one thought. So instead of 10

million mines, the figure now in vogue is closer to one million—still a huge number to contend with in Cambodia’s future.

Notes

¹Cambodia or Kampuchea? What is the difference? Kampuchea is the Khmer language word for Cambodia. Throughout this paper, Cambodia will be used to refer to the country and the people will be referred to as Cambodians or Khmers. There will be times when Kampuchea is used. Both words are really interchangeable. However, Cambodia is found to be the preferred, more common name for the country. This seems to be so because it is the way the country is referred to in the 23 October 1991 Paris Peace Agreements.

Some use of the word Kampuchea is more appropriate than using Cambodia. For example, a common reference for the Khmer Rouge is “DK.” This is in reference to “Democratic Kampuchea,” the breakaway government the Khmer Rouge prefer to refer to themselves as. This name proclaimed the Communist Party designation for Cambodia on January 8, 1976, eight months after Lon Nol’s army was defeated and the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot assumed control of the country of Cambodia.

Therefore, this paper will use “Cambodia” throughout unless “Kampuchea” is more appropriate.

²David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1983), 9.

³Marlowe Hood and David A. Albin, *The Cambodian Agony* (Armonk, NY.: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), xv.

⁴*Ibid.*, xvi.

⁵*Ibid.*, xvii.

⁶*Ibid.*, xix.

⁷William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York.: Simon and Schuster, 1979) 46.

⁸Statement of Lieutenant General Phillip B. Davidson in the book edited by Harry G. Summers, Jr., *Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War* (New York.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995) 204.

⁹Shawcross, 45-52.

¹⁰Chandler, 212.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 213-224.

¹²Discussions with the International Relations Department Personnel, Ministry of National Defense, Phnom Penh Cambodia, on 5 March 1997, during the Air War College Regional Studies Trip to Cambodia and Thailand.

¹³Michael W. Doyle, *UN Peacekeeping in Cambodia, UNTAC’s Civil Mandate* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 17.

¹⁴It is important to note one purpose of the Paris Peace Agreements was to remove an impediment to the emerging détente among the US, China, and the USSR. Another was to deal with the embarrassing situation in which members of the UN, including the US, continued to recognize the Khmer Rouge and its exiled leaders as part of the legitimate government of Cambodia. To include the Khmer Rouge in the agreement was widely

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seen as a compromise with an evil force, but Western leaders argued that it was a pragmatic compromise. There was no other way to persuade the Chinese both to stop supporting Pol Pot's troops and to recognize the Vietnamese backed regime, which they regarded as an enemy. The only alternative was continuing war.

¹⁵United States General Accounting Office, *Briefing Report to the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Committee on International relations, House of Representatives, 29 February 1996, CAMBODIA: Limited Progress on Free Elections, Human Rights, and Mine Clearing* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1996), 1-3.

¹⁶Department of State, *Hidden Killers: The Global Problem With Uncleared Landmines, a Report on International Demining*. (Washington, DC.: Government Printing Office, 1993), 105.

¹⁷*Landmines: A Deadly Legacy*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993. 177.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 178-181.

¹⁹Judy L. Ledgerwood, "UN Peacekeeping Missions: The Lessons From Cambodia," *Asia Pacific Issues*, No. 11 (March 1994), 8-10.

²⁰United States General Accounting Office, Section III.

Chapter 3

UNTAC Arrives

There is no reason why men and women from far away countries should shed their blood on behalf of communities unwilling to come to terms with each other.

—Ian Kemp

Peacekeeping isn't a soldier's job, but only a soldier can do it.

—Charles Moskos

The Commander for the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia was able to participate in the UN's military survey mission to that country. With this experience he was able to help shape the structure and composition of the military force before its deployment. In addition, his time in Cambodia gave him a firsthand look at the terrain, the people, and the leaders of factions with whom he would have to interact.

—Colonel Karl Farris

The United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia, (UNAMIC), preceded the United Nations Transitional Authority, Cambodia (UNTAC). However, UNAMIC could never have possibly prepared the country of Cambodia for what was to be one of the largest, and most expensive, missions the United Nations ever undertook. In many ways, UNTAC brought the 1990's to Cambodia. Yet, UNTAC may have meant 10 million different things to the 10 million people of Cambodia. It may be more accurate to say UNTAC brought certain “bytes” of the 1990's world to Cambodia. It brought things the Khmer countryside was not used to seeing on a daily basis. UNTAC became more than

the UN arriving to enforce the Paris Peace Agreements of October 1991. UNTAC meant an election—whatever that was. UNTAC became a noun, a collective “call sign” for anyone wearing the blue UN beret. Walk into the most remote jungle village and the little Khmer children would spit it out like machine gun fire—UNTAC!, UNTAC!!, UNTAC!!!, UUUNNTACCCC!! If any blue beret had preceded a United Nations Officer to any location, there was no name, no country, no physical description of the predecessor, only an “I talked to UNTAC about...” The Khmers learned four new words when the United Nations arrived, “hello,” “OK,” “good-bye,” (good-bye, whether you were coming or going) and the most versatile of all, “UNTAC.” If Cambodia has a master lexicographer, they must certainly include “UNTAC” in the next edition of the Cambodian dictionary.

Who Was UNTAC?

Those who can make a war well can rarely make a good peace, and those who could make a good peace would never have won the war.

—Winston Churchill

One of the nations with a sizable contingent in Cambodia had a particularly low level of tolerance for casualties, which directly affected operational planning.

—Colonel Karl Farris

UNTAC consisted of military and civilian personnel from Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, France, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Russian Federation, Senegal, Thailand, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay, and the United States.¹

The key to the acronym UNTAC is the letter “T” for transitional. The United Nations had accomplished only one “transitional authority” mission previous to UNTAC and that was in Namibia. The Paris Peace Agreements of 1991 signed by Cambodia and 18 other countries was to provide Cambodia a “system of liberal democracy” and “for periodic and genuine elections.”² “Transition was to ensure the country’s perpetual advance to progress, prosperity, affluence, and glory.”³

Just what did the United Nations to accomplish in Cambodia? The UNTAC mandate, described in the December 1995 edition of *Current History*, encompassed the following implementation plan:

On February 28, 1992, the Security Council approved the plan of the new UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to implement the Cambodia Peace Agreement. The unanimously approved resolution authorized a total force of roughly 22,000, including 15,900 soldiers, 3,600 police monitors (CIVPOL), and 2,400 civilian monitors/administrators. Total costs were projected at \$1.9 billion for a mission lasting 18 months. The plan called for separate voluntary contributions for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Cambodia, with early estimates of need reaching \$800 million. Repatriation of the 350,000-370,000 refugees was budgeted at \$116 million and also financed separately from the rest of the UNTAC operation.⁴

The UNTAC Charter

By 1993, there were more than 100 such groups (NGOs or Non-Governmental Organizations and PVOs or Private Voluntary Organizations) in Cambodia. Some had been there for ten years; for much of that time they constituted the only foreign presence in the country.

—Colonel Karl Farris

An interesting aspect of the UNTAC operation has already been identified. The vast majority of personnel participating in the UNTAC mission were military. A total of ten countries provided battalion sized contingents of personnel. These troops arrived with

their own vehicles, munitions, and weapons. The initial plan called for these battalions to be self sufficient, without a heavy resupply, for 60 days. Many arrived unprepared, expecting UN help upon their arrival. The sheer cost of the equipment used throughout the mission is indeed astounding. Over \$1.9 billion was spent, and this is staggering when you realize the military troops were supposed to be self sufficient to some degree.

The tasks UNTAC was to accomplish fell into six major categories: refugee repatriation; cease-fire and demobilization; elections; human rights; civil administration; and rehabilitation and construction. The tasks facing UNTAC were certainly daunting, especially when one considers that the military role was rather structured. The civilian administration corps of the United Nations accomplished the main role of administration, which included basic acquisition and logistics functions.

Judy L. Ledgerwood, who had lived in Cambodia for seven years previous to the arrival of UNTAC, had this to say about the mission:

The peace agreement led to what was then the largest UN peacekeeping mission in history, UNTAC. The mission which cost more than 1.5 billion, was organized into seven major components: military, civilian police, electoral, human rights, rehabilitation, repatriation, and civil administration. What the vast majority of rural Cambodians saw of UNTAC members, besides their ubiquitous white Toyota land cruisers and Nissan pickups jolting up and down country roads, were individual electoral staff and civilian police who were posted throughout the countryside in district towns and traveled to villages during voter registration and polling. They were also likely to have seen UNTAC military patrols made up of soldiers of many nations—Uruguayans, Pakistanis, Dutch, Indians, French, and so on. German military doctors provided medical care, Russian civilian pilots flew the helicopters, Australian signal men handled communications, and the roads were repaired by Chinese, Japanese, Polish, and Thai engineers.⁵

UNTAC, the most ambitious and expensive undertaking ever attempted by the United Nations, was to be the first mission ever directed by civilian administrators. Was

there an imbalance in the number of personnel assigned? An imbalance did exist in that there were over 15,900 military, 3,600 Civilian Police (CIVPOL), and only 2,400 civil administrators. The civil administrators were responsible for six of the seven critical functions of this mission. The personal observations of the author indicate these personnel imbalances affected the operation of the UNTAC mission. For example, the lack of logistics personnel hampered the availability and distribution of much needed supplies. Additionally, morale suffered when there were not enough properly trained administrative personnel to pay UNTAC military personnel and to properly process leave and compensatory time off paperwork. All of these influences and imbalances set the stage for what was and continues to be the most ambitious mission the United Nations ever accomplished.

“The basic objectives of the military were the traditional security arrangements: stabilize the military situation, build confidence among parties to the conflict, and prevent risks of a return to warfare.”⁶

Author Michael W. Doyle points out that UNTAC was also required to add several new key civilian duties:

- To control and supervise critical aspects of civil administration
- To organize and monitor the elections as first step toward a “system of liberal democracy, on the basis of pluralism.”

And furthermore:

- To coordinate with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) the repatriation of more than 370,000 refugees living in camps on the Thai side of the border,
- To foster an environment ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and
- To help plan and raise funds for the social and economic rehabilitation of Cambodia⁷

For the first time, a UN civilian administrated operation (unlike those in Namibia, Niagara, Haiti, and Angola), was in charge of the entire organization and supervision of elections.⁸

UNTAC's Scorecard

I expect to pass through this world but once; any good thing therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.

—Attributed to Etienne de Grellet

Was UNTAC, up to the time of the elections, a success story? There are many factors at play with this simple question. To say that at the time of the elections in May 1993, UNTAC had succeeded or failed would truly depend on the particular aspect of the UNTAC mission you wish to address.

Criticism came from Cambodia's own leaders. For example, the CPP chieftains claimed that 20,000 Peacekeepers could not bring an end to the fighting among the four factions.⁹ UNTAC was also criticized for its ineffectiveness in monitoring the cease-fire and even accused of "lacking courage" in carrying out its objectives.¹⁰ "This strategy of restraint came at a cost, as UNTAC soldiers were called cowards by the State of Cambodia government media, which said that 'UNTACs' could run faster than the civilian population because they had cars and helicopters to run away in. Despite the bad publicity, UNTAC never allowed itself to be goaded into fighting Cambodia's war."¹¹ Already beset by many problems, UNTAC was also accused of being slow to confront the dangers posed by the endemic antagonism towards Vietnamese in Cambodia. Further, denouncing the polls as a farce aimed at legitimizing what it called the continued

Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, Khmer Rouge leaders said they would hold UNTAC responsible for the consequences of an election held without a neutral political environment.¹² The most serious of UNTAC's shortcomings and failures, according to Sihanouk, was their inability to bring about the disarming and demobilization of the factions' armies. Most glaring is the fact that the Khmer Rouge signed the October 1991 Paris Peace Agreements but then refused to disarm their fighters or participate in the actual electoral process.¹³

Despite all the tensions and discontent, the United Nations did successfully accomplish an election in May 1993. However, it could not turn about decades of horror and bloodshed into a thriving democracy overnight. But the UN tried, and did point Cambodia in the right direction, at last.

In fact, the UNTAC mission ensured an election which was fair and commanded integrity in spite of internal political jockeying for position. During the election campaign phase, mini 'electoral conventions' by the various political parties turned into heated rallies of rhetoric. For a country that had not had a free and fair election in over twenty years, these political rallies were truly a sight to behold.¹⁴ Even in the most remote part of a jungle village, small, crude, yet effective podiums were built to allow each political party to help their cause and "get out the vote." UNTAC and especially the UNMO contingent helped to oversee these rallies and ensure the village people were getting the true political picture. UNTAC even provided bullhorns, so soft-spoken candidates could get their message across loudly and clearly.¹⁵

Author Steve Heder noted in his article, "Cambodia's Democratic Transition to Neoauthoritarianism," that "The CPP's rhetoric was relentlessly militant. It promised

continued struggle not only against Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge but also against FUNCINPEC and the BLDP, which it alleged were mere fronts for Pol Pot and behind a serious crime wave that had accompanied the erosion of State of Cambodia control brought about by the Paris Agreements."¹⁶ Notable, this rhetoric was from and directed at co-signers of the Paris Peace Agreements. FUNCINPEC nevertheless won a stunning upset victory in the May 1993 constituent assembly elections, taking 45 percent of the popular vote. The Cambodian People's Party came in second with 38 percent, and the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party was third with 4 percent.¹⁷

Admittedly, however, author Judy Ledgerwood noted:

UNTAC was not a well-oiled machine to which orders could be issued with reasonable assurance that they would be carried out as intended. Focusing UNTAC's disparate military component—including contingents from 34 nations, each equipped, organized, and trained differently—was a monumental task which only a commander possessing strength of mind, calm optimism, confidence, limitless patience, resourcefulness and steady nerve. The leader's vision must be clearly thought-out and consistently applied. He must not waver; he must provide the anchor not only for the military component, but also for the entire UN effort.¹⁸

So where the election did take on a free-flowing direction of its own, other areas were inadequately addressed, reverted to the way they were before the elections, or never were accomplished according to the UNTAC charter. When looking at the UNTAC charter and mission, one must foremost consider:

In UNTAC's case, the lack of cooperation from the key belligerents led to immediate and significant challenges to the UN's roles as administrator, mediator, and guarantor of the Paris Peace Accords, as well as its attempts at impartiality. In evaluating UNTAC's performance for future missions, the challenge of the observer is to filter out those exogenous factors beyond the control of the Organization as well as those unique to the endless, intractable conflict in that country. In addition, the predilection of decision-makers to label a mission as a success or failure and seek immediate lessons yields an instrument too blunt for productive analysis.¹⁹

However, the most basic opposition to the total success of the UNTAC mission was that UNTAC suffered from operational shortcomings in an atmosphere of decaying consent among the parties involved: Steven Ratner in *The New UN Peacekeeping* noted:

UNTAC's mission was, as noted, hampered from the outset by important exogenous variables: the fragile consent and inadequate cooperation of the Cambodian elites; the shattered country in which it operated; an often disengaged attitude among outside powers preoccupied with other crises; and an unprepared, overstretched Secretariat, neither ready to dispatch such an unprecedented, multifunctional mission nor able adequately to oversee it.²⁰

Additionally, a universal theme expressed by almost all UNMOs was that a general knowledge of basic history and culture prior to arriving in country was lacking. Author Steve Ratner also noted that:

While first-generation operations could suffice with only military expertise, the new peacekeeping requires an integration of knowledge of the history, culture, and current policies of the country into the daily functioning of the mission. This need for basic knowledge will affect all future missions; in this UNTAC proved only partially competent.²¹

Even with a lack of history and cultural knowledge, the UNTAC show did continue. Perhaps the most difficult task of UNTAC was the inherent tension among the factions who signed the Paris Peace Accords. While the accords themselves may have held the germ of the conflict, the unfolding of the events of the settlement period brought it to its full fruition.²²

Unquestionably, the major failure of UNTAC was that it did not disarm the combatants.²³ This fact led to two sad consequences. First, the Khmer Rouge had even more reason to use force to make their demands known, especially during the election period. Second was the SOC's use of military and Interior Ministry secret police to attack the offices of opposition political offices.²⁴ Not only did the UN face problems among

the factions; they faced problems among themselves. One main cause was the inequities in pay among the United Nations soldiers. Because each nation chose to pay its soldiers differently, all soldiers faced the same combat dangers but for different rates of compensation. To solve this demoralizing dilemma, personnel from all nations taking part in a UN peacekeeping operation should operate under a central UN command with a standard set of requirements, protection, and compensation.²⁵

If major failures could be compared, an even greater failure for UNTAC was the miserable performance of the 3,600-member civilian police component (CIVPOL) that were supposed to train and supervise the local police and help protect human rights during the mission.²⁶ They were paid the UN mission subsistence allowance (MSA) of \$130.00 per day—over \$300 million total—in addition to their usual salaries. These “police officers” were assigned as individuals throughout the country and were on duty 24 hours a day, receiving five days off per month as compensatory time off, popularly known among the UNTAC troops as simply “CTO Time.” Because they were not briefed on the situation of Cambodia, had ample free time, and could roam as freely as they wanted under the guise of “police business,” trouble brewed.²⁷

Social relations, a cornerstone of UN activity was thrown a setback in many ways from UNTAC troops, especially the CIVPOL. Public lewdness, flagrant public intoxication, and reckless driving were just some of their more undesirable traits. CIVPOL, with their “free roam style” of the countryside patrolling methods, did actually do a good job monitoring ‘red light’ activities and were instrumental in closing down some of the most notorious houses of prostitution in Phnom Penh. However, these prostitutes, now out of work, evoked the lust and pity of the CIVPOL and many, to

include ethnic Vietnamese, were brought home to the CIVPOL living quarters to become live in housekeepers and girlfriends. Indeed, a rather sad commentary on “one-stop-shopping.” All of this was the wrong picture to paint to a Buddhist nation of Khmers who were not accustomed to this daily activity.²⁸

Lastly, administration and staffing came up short in the UNTAC success report card. Officials such as Yasushi Akashi himself noted that things would have gone smoother if equipment had been ordered correctly and if it had arrived on time as required. Due to the slow UN budgetary process in New York headquarters, the Khmer Rouge figured it was pointless to seriously consider laying down their weapons since this whole UNTAC effort lacked seriousness. The very nature of the bureaucratic nature of the UN system led to long time lags between the discovery of a problem and the decision to take corrective action, which in a crisis situation was often unacceptable.²⁹

There could be no argument, as according to author Judy Ledgerwood when she states, “I stress that future mission planning should take up as a central concern the way that the mission will be perceived by the local population. Lastly, the UN should streamline its administrative procedures so that officials can swiftly implement their decisions and revise them quickly in light of new information.”³⁰

Notes

¹United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, *Asian Defense Journal*, April 1993, 29.

²Steve Heder, “Cambodia’s Democratic Transition to Neoauthoritarianism,” *Current History* 94, no.596 (December 1995): 425.

³Ibid.

⁴Janet E. Heiniger, *Peacekeeping in Transition: The United Nations in Cambodia*, (New York.: The Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1994), 12.

⁵Judy L. Ledgerwood, “UN Peacekeeping Missions The Lessons From Cambodia,” *Asia Pacific Issues*, No. 11 (March 1994), 3-4.

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⁶Michael W. Doyle, *UN Peacekeeping in Cambodia, UNTAC's Civil Mandate* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 28.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, 29

⁹Isaac Yusuf, "The United Nations Military Operation in Cambodia," *Asian Defense Journal*, May 1993. 6.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹Ledgerwood, 11.

¹²Yusuf, 22.

¹³*Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁴Personal observations by the author, Koh Kong Province, provincial district of Sre Amble, Sector 6, United Nations Military Observer (UNMO) Team SAE 606, Cambodia, December 1992 to May 1993.

¹⁵Personal observations of the author, during the period February to May 1993, Koh Kong Province, provincial district of Sre Amble. Political parties observed include FUNCINPEC, BLDP, and CPP.

¹⁶Heder, *Cambodia's Democratic Transition*, 427.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Ledgerwood, 11.

¹⁹Steven R. Ratner, *The New UN Peacekeeping* (Scranton, PA.: Haddon Craftsman, 1995). 4.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 194.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*, 198. Note also, that the UN Civil Administration could have done a much better job here administrating the pay dilemmas.

²³Ledgerwood, 6-10.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*, 6-10. Note, additionally, the personal observations of the author of this paper attest to the fact that the civilian police, "CIVPOL" were for the most part womanizers, gamblers, drunks, and in general, a menace to the Cambodian countryside. They did little if anything to instill a sense of law and order. As far as helping to preserve or enforce the dignity for their fellow man and instill a sense of human rights, they were for the most part oblivious to this fact. Many were from countries that are world renowned for human rights violations. In short, they were a disgrace, period.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 7.

²⁸Personal observations of the author in Koh Kong Province, Phnom Penh, and Kompong Thom Province. Interestingly, the closer to the action the CIVPOL or UNTAC trooper was, the less this kind of activity was seen. For example, in Phnom Penh, this was truly business as usual. Koh Kong Province became a new Cambodian stronghold for any type of lascivious activity, and in Kompong Thom Province, in the heart of active Khmer Rouge occupation, this kind of behavior was very subdued.

²⁹Ledgerwood, 8-10.

Notes

³⁰Ibid., 10.

Chapter 4

Cambodia Today

Do not get in trouble as a commander in the field after 5 pm New York time or Saturday or Sunday. There is no one to answer the phone. It is a nine-to-five civilian operation.

—Ian Kemp

I don't want to keep going around begging for money. But if they cut off assistance, it can mean the cutting of more trees.

—Hun Sen

In many ways UNTAC peacekeeping was a nine-to-five job. After all, UN headquarters was in New York City. But other than work hours, how did UNTAC meet its mission?

Measuring success in complex United Nations' peace operations does not lend itself to simple indicators. Fulfillment of peace treaties negotiated among the parties and of mandates designed by the Secretariat are two obvious indicators of success, but they are neither necessary nor sufficient.¹ The United Nations spent over 1.9 billion on the UNTAC mission. Subsequent to 1992, the UN budget did not come close on an annual basis to the single dollar amount spent in Cambodia. To put this in perspective, let us look at the acknowledged successes and failures of the mission beyond the UNTAC charter and UNTAC sponsored elections. Since the UN has had the most positive impact on the Cambodia of today, successes and failures in one way or another find their source

in the UN mission. It will help to keep in mind there are some things money cannot buy—success being one of them. Other priceless commodities also include democracy, freedom, and a better way of life. The United Nations did not totally bring all of these things to Cambodia, but it made drastic in-roads for Cambodia's future.

We must remember Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the entire world, poorest in almost any indicator of measurement. Colonel Karl Farris, former Director of the Army's recently established Peacekeeping Institute at the Army War College said, "When the United States deployed to Cambodia it found a country that had been isolated from most of the world for two decades and had been the scene of continuous fighting for almost three decades. Cambodian society had been shattered and was almost powerless to plan for its future."²

Colonel Farris goes on to further say:

In 1993 Cambodia had a per capita income of only US \$150.00 per person; an annual birth rate of 40 per 1000, the highest in Asia; an infant mortality rate of 123 in 1000; 20.5 percent of the population is under four years of age; 45 percent of the population is under 45 years of age; 60-65 percent of the population is female; life expectancy is 49.7 years, one of the lowest in the world; of reported child deaths, 40 percent are of diarrhoeal nature; malaria is endemic with 500,000 cases a year resulting in 10,000 deaths; there are an estimated 20,000 cases of new tuberculosis per year; child malnutrition is estimated to be 22 percent in Phnom Penh and 32 percent in the provinces; the actual literacy rate is only 30 percent; the quality of education remains low and the drop-out rate high; only one of four Cambodians is in school; while on the surface it looked encouraging, the 370,000 returning refugees in 1993 joined 165,000 already displaced in-place persons in Cambodia; with 35,000 amputees, Cambodia has the highest proportion of physically disabled persons in any country of the world.³

This incredible collection of indicators paints an “extremely bleak picture of adverse social conditions caused by poverty, war, meager healthcare, and very poor household hygiene.”⁴

Big Picture Successes and Failures

Recent Khmer politics has more intrigues than an Agatha Christie novel, more actions than a Jackie Chan movie, more twists and turns than a Kam Yong’s Kung Fu action adventure series, and worst of all it beats Stephen King for its portrayal of horror and revenge—while leaving a foul taste in the mouth.

—Anonymous

Starting on the success story side, “although the country was temporarily subject to the UN’s “transitional authority,” it also enjoyed, for perhaps the first time, the prospect of true independence from the control of any foreign power. Having endured French and Japanese colonialism before 1954, and US, Chinese, and Vietnamese competition for influence thereafter, Cambodia in the 1990s experienced national self-determination. But as of September 1993, for better or worse, Cambodia was in the hands of the Cambodians. This is what the UNTAC “Transition” was supposed to transition to.”⁵

Second, the mere presence of UNTAC had an impact—it signaled the end of full-scale war. The country became for the most part peaceful. True, some provinces remained very tense, but skirmishes were limited in duration and the pitched battles of 1990 and earlier ended.⁶

Third, more than 370,000 refugees were peacefully repatriated from camps in Thailand, despite dire prognostications from experts a year earlier that this effort could not be accomplished. In what became UNCHR’s “most complex, best funded and most

visible refugee repatriation,” the Repatriation Component of UNTAC (staffed by UNCHR) organized a massive undertaking with the cooperation and support of the Military Component, the Cambodian Red Cross, and other humanitarian and relief organizations.⁷ Fourth, UNTAC organized an election in a country with a shattered physical infrastructure.⁸ A large, looming question now awaits: Is Cambodia ready to hold a self-sufficient election in 1998?

UNTAC, however, the most expensive and most ambitious peacekeeping operation the world ever saw was not without its detractors and flaws. Author Michael W. Doyle says, “If we look at UNTAC’s official, initial, mandate we can see two major areas of failure. The first lies in the failure to achieve a cease-fire and then canton, demobilize, and disarm the military forces (70 percent) of the four factions, and the second is the failure to achieve control over civil administration and to prevent breakdowns in law and order and political neutrality.”⁹

Concerning the second identified failure, “UNTAC also failed to establish effective control over Cambodian civil administration. The Paris Peace Agreements specified that UNTAC would control five essential areas of administration and do so over each of the four factions. The areas specified were defense, public security, finance, information, and foreign affairs. By controlling them, it was anticipated, UNTAC would be able to ensure that the political environment was neutral, that no faction (especially the predominant State of Cambodia or SOC) would be able to employ sovereign resources to tilt the electoral contest in its favor.”¹⁰

Modern Social Consequences

You bring the prostitutes into the room by yourself because the manager is not a responsible person.

—Sign in rooms of tourist hotels,
Siem Reap, Cambodia

Most of the recorded history and documentation of present day Cambodia centers on lists of things. For example, “There were seven main parts to the UNTAC mission and these three or four areas were a success or these three or four areas were a failure.”

With success and failure comes reality. Crimes, in the form of violence, theft, prostitution, robbery, and graft to name a few, were not new concepts to Cambodia. In some ways, they were a way of life. Nor are these concepts or actions new to any civilization today. Along with Cambodia entering the 1990s, in a “peaceful but tense” way, reality has also entered and reinforced itself with a vengeance.

The presence of large numbers of United Nations personnel, both military and civilian, did not in itself open a Pandora’s Box of illicit activity. However, in some ways, it certainly helped to shake that box and show Cambodia a society and lifestyle outside the box. An example is the proliferation of Acquired Immunodeficiency Disease Syndrome (AIDS). Prior to UNTAC arrival, Cambodia, a previously closed society, had only a dozen documented AIDS cases reported. Maybe the reporting mechanism was not there, but just as likely the closed social structure of Cambodia kept AIDS from becoming a problem. The United Nations presence did not help. One infantry battalion (which will remain unnamed) alone reported over 60 cases of AIDS from its troops upon return to their country.¹¹

Detractors who do not wish to acknowledge any forward progress in Cambodia are also quick to point out that the economy and infrastructure of today's Cambodia are both broke. Long time critic and expert on Cambodia, William Shawcross, who has been involved in reporting on Cambodia since the 1980s says, "Cambodia has barely begun the difficult task of economic renewal. Despite the progress [of UNTAC], the budget situation is still vulnerable to a weak economy and military needs. The revenue system fails to tax entire sectors—including agriculture, which contributes 50 percent of Cambodia's gross domestic product [GDP]. Shawcross further states, "Cambodia has little to export except rubber and timber. Tires constitute its only real manufactured product. It is difficult to determine the extent of illegal trade in cigarettes, alcohol, lumber, and gems."¹²

The needs for rehabilitation and assistance also touch on the rural poverty of the Khmers. Shawcross again reports, "The population is growing at an extraordinary rapid rate of 2.8 percent per annum; more than half of the population is under 15, and the average Cambodian dies before reaching 50; more than half of today's Cambodian households are headed by women, and the traditional family support system has been destroyed."¹³ Further, the population growth is debilitated. Many provinces have no health services at all, and only half of the entire population has access to even the most rudimentary health services. International organizations have estimated that about 12 percent of the rural and only 20 percent of city-dwellers have access to reliable drinking water. Add to this over 1 million active landmines and a population where one in every 263 persons is a living casualty from a land mine injury.¹⁴

Two more items in the country stand out—roads and the public sector. Over the past 23 years, Cambodia’s basic structures have been allowed to languish and decay. Since economy and infrastructure are interdependent, without new capital, new industries cannot open and the economy cannot expand. An example of the road situation is Route 7. This road runs northeast from Kompong Cham through Snoul and Kratie to Stung Treng and once had a macadam surface for all of its 363 kilometers. It is now passable only in the dry season, and its surface is so appalling that the journey takes three days instead of the few hours previously.¹⁵ In the public sector, Cambodia currently employs about 147,000 personnel, or 1.7 percent of the entire population—almost double what is usually considered the appropriate proportion for a developing country, let alone for a government that has ceased to perform many of the traditional functions of government.¹⁶

Money laundering has also become more than just a cottage industry in today’s Cambodia.

“The problem starts with the country’s financial institutions. Several banks in Phnom Penh exist in name only, offering neither interest nor loans. ‘They simply act as a funnel for money to pass through,’ says a lawyer who deals extensively with the banking sector. ‘They just do wire transfers and are being used to move money in and out of the country.’”¹⁷ In fact, 19 of 29 banks operating in Phnom Penh are suspected of being fronts for money laundering, according to the local press, which have cited an unreleased report for co-Interior Minister, Sar Kheng.¹⁸

One financial analyst who has watched Cambodia’s economy for the past two years believes that money laundering is the engine driving Phnom Penh’s cash economy. “There are at least 100 new clubs and restaurants in the city operating on a strictly cash

only basis.”¹⁹ With all this “new” money floating around, it is no wonder today’s Khmer can often be seen riding around town in \$36,000 automobiles. Meanwhile, the rest of the population is somehow able to survive on an annual salary less than \$200.00.

The influx of dollars has truly created a lust for money or more appropriately money for lust. Asia’s new wealth is also fueling an explosion in the commercial sex industry, with Indochina as ground zero. The fear of AIDS is no deterrent—it has spurred the trafficking of young girls.²⁰

Just past the burned-out shell of Phnom Penh’s university, through a gate topped by a huge ‘Pepsi’ sign, is the building where 14-year-old Mat Srey Mom, locally known as ‘Suzy,’ got her first economics lesson. It’s a brothel, and she says her mom sold her there two months ago for \$200 US dollars.”²¹ “Anyone who sees romance in Mom’s cramped little cubicle should look again—the sex industry is ruled by the cold, hard laws of economics. This demand for young flesh is the most disturbing new trend in an industry that has adjusted with amazing alacrity to the region’s economic and social transformation.”²²

In fact, when all the metrics were in, an interesting comparison can be made to “casualties” suffered during the UNTAC mission. UNTAC forces lost 21 lives to hostilities encountered in the actual Peacekeeping mission. It will have lost at least four times that number on the moral battlefield due to AIDS. As stated earlier, one unnamed battalion had over 60 cases of AIDS out of 450 soldiers, all in one unit! Some of these soldiers actually had three forms of sexually transmitted diseases: AIDS, syphilis, and gonorrhea.²³

In addition to money laundering and prostitution, another factor erodes the foundation for peace and democracy laid by the United Nations in Cambodia. Now the country’s fragile democratic institutions are being subverted by the wealth of drug lords. Cambodia is a place where, as one American official charges, criminal syndicates “are

using government planes, helicopters, military trucks, navy boats, and soldiers to transport heroin.”²⁴ Doubly disturbing, some of the same military units involved in drug trafficking have been implicated in political violence, pointing to dangerously close links between crime syndicates and political figures. Cambodian sources, international law enforcement officials, and diplomats report numerous senior military officers and police officers are involved in transporting heroin through Cambodia or protecting the traffic.²⁵ At one time, Cambodian officials may have feared that the US would not grant “Most Favored Nation” [MFN] status to Cambodia unless the country cleaned up its drug act. However, nothing is for certain. The US could have simply not enforced any sanctions or the US could have granted a “national interest waiver” sparing the full force of any sanctions.²⁶ However, these MFN concerns were never really concerns for Cambodia. The country received US House Ways and Means Committee voice confirmation of MFN status on 20 June 1995. President Clinton confirmed MFN status to Cambodia on 31 July 1996, making MFN status “official” for Cambodia.²⁷

However, MFN status or not, there are occasional drug raids that meet with varying degrees of success. During one such recent raid, a combined force of police and customs officers swooped down on a speedboat off Koh Kong Province on 11 August 1995, seizing 71 kilograms of heroin. Ironically, the two arrested smugglers were cops, who quickly fingered their superior officer. “The province of Koh Kong is entirely under the control of the Mafia,” said one senior Cambodian government official.²⁸

Today's Cambodian Reality

Please save us from our leaders.

—Anonymous

Once I have stepped down, I could live peacefully in the middle of our motherland and close to those who love me and asked me not to flee abroad leaving them orphans.

—King Norodom Sihanouk

One of the most talked about concerns in Cambodia today remains the question of what to do about the Khmer Rouge situation. Are they still in fact a concern? Does the current dual leadership coalition of the FUNCINPEC and CPP parties have an answer?

Talk about the Khmer Rouge and the names of three notorious leaders continue to surface. These individuals are Pol Pot (Sloth Sar), Ta Mok (The Butcher of Cambodia), and Ieng Sary (the brother-in-law of Pol Pot).

In June 1996, the *Phnom Penh Post* reported unsubstantiated claims that Pol Pot was dead. The same paper reported in August 1996 that indeed Pol Pot was ailing badly and in deteriorating health but he was still the viable recognized leader of the Khmer Rouge. However, the Khmer Rouge news of today centers around Ieng Sary, recognized for his long-standing differences with other Khmer Rouge leaders.

One school of thought claims the KR are still a vile factor and should never become a recognized part of the modern Cambodian democracy. While Hun Sen, head of the CPP and half of present day Cambodian leadership, has said, "Granting an amnesty to Ieng Sary can hasten the process of integrating his forces...under the control of the Royal Government of Cambodia."²⁹ Further, Hun Sen urges Sihanouk's son, Prince Ranariddh, (head of the FUNCINPEC party) to back amnesty for Ieng Sary.³⁰

A noted authority on present day Cambodia, Michael Doyal, said in a recent article in the *International Herald Tribune*,

Government forces have not been able to inflict decisive defeats on the guerrillas, who pose no military threat to the population centers. The recent defections of Khmer Rouge cadres do not fundamentally change the situation. Thousands of more effective Khmer Rouge forces remain entrenched deep in the border jungles. It is time to contain, rather than to try to defeat, the Khmer Rouge forces and to use the resources for more urgent purposes.³¹

The argument on whether Ieng Sary should be granted amnesty and how such an amnesty would affect the remainder of the Khmer Rouge forces is still unfolding. On 4 September 1996, the *International Herald Tribune* commented, “King Norodom Sihanouk granted amnesty to Khmer Rouge Ieng Sary, a rebel leader widely blamed for involvement in the deaths of up to two million people, including members of the royal family. Sihanouk, who has the sole power to make such a decision, apparently bowed to the wishes of the country’s two co-premiers, who hope the pardon for Ieng Sary will help end two decades of civil war. The decree, which all three signed, was effective immediately. Sihanouk acted without waiting for the vote of support by the National Assembly, upon which he previously insisted.” Sary commented, “I have no regrets because this was not my responsibility, my brother-in-law [Pol Pot] did it all.”³²

However, as of 25 February 1997, Ing Sary was not only granted amnesty, he was granted a very high political place within the coalition government. The co-prime ministers acknowledged he was too old to be made a general, so he will be an as yet unspecified political advisor to Cambodia.³³

To the outside observer, Cambodian politics is a series of deals between leaders where the voters themselves appear to go with the flow of their favorite, or both, co-

premiers. There is not a family, and possibly not an individual, who not been a victim of Khmer Rouge atrocity. Yet, pardons are being granted with or without the two-thirds majority of the National Assembly. As all of this unfolds, it is difficult to see what the end result will be on the future of Cambodia. An outsider may ask, “How could the Khmer Rouge ever be a viable part of the Assembly and hold seats?”

As *Time Magazine* observed: “The government appears willing to deal with anyone for the sake of dismantling the Khmer Rouge and bringing an end to fighting that still causes thousands of death every year. It sounds unfathomable, victims living with executioners. But the country of Cambodia and its people may have no choice. Many people joined the Khmer Rouge as a response to then Prince Sihanouk’s call for resistance to a US backed regime in 1970; many more joined after Vietnam’s invasion.”³⁴

Underneath this pragmatism is a deep bitterness over the past Khmer Rouge genocide. “In Bosnia they have found a score or more of mass graves,” says Craig Etcheson, manager of a Yale University project to document the genocide. “In Cambodia there are tens of thousands of mass graves.”³⁵

Others blame the blatant corruption on the elected officials from the May 1993 elections. “The democratic institutions which were to be installed by the UN operation and elections have not taken root—and the rise of a Mafia influence is a reason. There is no independent parliament, the judiciary is controlled by politicians, newspapers have been shut down, journalists assassinated and many jailed, and opposition parties are all illegal.”³⁶

There are no easy answers to these hard facts. Former Minister of Finance, Sam Rainsy,³⁷ recently stated this best when he said, “Prospects for peace must not be used as

a smokescreen to cover or legalize criminal activities.”³⁸ Add uncontrolled deforestation, a general plundering of natural resources (timber, gems, rubber, fish), drug producing and drug smuggling, accusations by Interpol that hundreds of the world’s most wanted criminals use Cambodia as a safe haven, and an increase in political assassinations and extra-judiciary executions to Cambodia’s list of things not to be proud of.³⁹ Some independent outsiders from around the world are now drawing strong parallels to the Khmer Rouge tactics of the late 1970’s all over again.

Notes

¹Michael W. Doyle, *UN Peacekeeping in Cambodia, UNTAC’s Civil Mandate* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 32.

²Col Karl Farris, “UN Peacekeeping in Cambodia: On Balance, A Success,” *Parameters* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 39-40.

³Peter Utting, ed., *Between Hope and Insecurity: The Social Consequences of the Cambodian Peace Process* (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Press, 1994) 45-50.

⁴*Ibid.*, 49.

⁵*Ibid.*, 32-33.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 35.

¹¹Nate Thayer, Johns Hopkins University, e-mail interview with author, 5 September 1996.

¹²William Shawcross, *Cambodia’s New Deal*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Contemporary Issues Paper #1, p.75-83.

¹³*Ibid.*, 78-79.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 80-81.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 81-82.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁷Matthew Lee, “Cash and Carry,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 12 October 1995, 29-30.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Andrew Sherry, et al., “For Lust or Money,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 14 December 1995, 22.

²¹*Ibid.*

Notes

²²Ibid.

²³Personal observation and conversation with UNTAC German Field Hospital Personnel and fellow UNMOs, August and September 1993, and in September and October 1996.

²⁴Nate Thayer, "Medellin on the Mekong," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 November 1995, 24-25.

²⁵Ibid., 25.

²⁶Ibid., 27.

²⁷Houn-Nam Ing, ed., *CAMNEWS*, on-line, Internet, 31 July 1996, available from <http://www.engr.cswb.edu/~hing/>.

²⁸Ibid., 31.

²⁹Editorial, *Singapore Press*, 11 September 1996.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Editorial, *The International Herald Tribune*, 4 September 1996.

³²The Associated Press, "Cambodian King Grants Rebel Amnesty" *Montgomery Advertiser*, 15 September 1996, sec. 3, p. 2.

³³Bill Herod, ed., *CAMNEWS*, on-line, Internet, 25 February 1997, available from <http://www.camres@forum.org.kh>.

³⁴*TIME International Magazine*, September 23, 1996, Volume 148, No. 13.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Nate Thayer, Johns Hopkins University, e-mail interview with author, 5 September 1996.

³⁷Concerning Sam Rainsy—although he is not a central theme in this paper, Sam Rainsy is very much a key political figure wielding considerable clout in Cambodia. Currently, he moves with impunity from Southern California, home of the largest group of Cambodians living in the US outside of Cambodia, throughout Cambodia spreading his political rhetoric. Sam Rainsy currently is thought of as the one "honest broker" in the Cambodian political scene. Currently, he holds the "unofficial" title of ousted opposition politician. He was the former Finance Minister, and is now currently the president of the dissident "Khmer Nations Party" or KNP. As of the last few months of 1996, Hun Sen's paranoia has become evident concerning Sam Rainsy—Hun Sen views Sam Rainsy as his greatest enemy and as his greatest political threat. With regards to the newly formed political party of Sam Rainsy, the Khmer National Party; the 1993 Royal Government has found one reason after another to declare this party illegal and to disqualify it from the upcoming 1998 elections. However, Rainsy's party claims a following of over 60,000 members—so a new twist is already in store for the 1998 elections.

³⁸-Nam Ing, ed., *CAMNEWS*, on-line, Internet, 23 September 1996 recorded interview with Mr. Sam Rainsy, available from <http://www.engr.cswb.edu/~hing/>.

³⁹Ibid.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Unforgettable...That's What You Are...

—Nat King Cole

Few countries exemplify humankind's capacity to inflict cruelty upon itself more than Cambodia.

—Human Rights Watch

It has now been four years since UNTAC departed Cambodia. The country's widely fluctuating fortunes have jeopardized some of the gains of the Paris Peace Accords and called into question some of the fundamental assumptions behind the deployment of UNTAC.¹ Contrary to the claims of some observers, few of the negative developments that have occurred in Cambodia since late 1993 can be attributed to the failings of UNTAC. Perhaps the most widely publicized and politically potent threat to the new order in Cambodia—although not the most immediately menacing by any stretch of the imagination—is the continued existence of the Khmer Rouge. The real, actual major threats are the persistent weaknesses and disarray of the new Government, mostly resulting from splits within the CPP and FUNCINPEC; persisting lawlessness; and the poor performance of the new Royal Cambodian Armed Forces.²

Whether the previous statements by Findlay about the potential and re-occurring problems with the Khmer Rouge are completely justified is questionable. The mere

existence of the Khmer Rouge evokes a type of morbid romanticism, fascination and, in reality, false expectations. Generally, the world was sorely disappointed with the Khmer Rouge in May 1993 when the voters turned out at the election to the tune of over 90 percent. The Khmer Rouge were expected, but unable, to disrupt the elections and lost substantial footing in the eyes of most of the world. While they hoped to continue to remain a force to be reckoned with in their area of Pailin in Battambang Province, that was not to remain so. Their numbers have now dwindled to several hundred did hard individuals, now led still by Ta Mok, but holed up in the ruins of Anlong Veng, about 60 miles north of Siem reap provincial town.³

While the numbers of active Khmer Rouge dissidents has now dwindled, their cruel and barbaric killing seems to be with them until their final days. A sort of trademark on barbarity they have forever been identified with. While their numbers are lower, they are reported to be continuing to kill and torture a reported 500 more innocent Cambodians in their last stronghold of Anlong Veng. In fact, government negotiators representing both co-prime ministers are feared kidnapped or dead as of March 1997.⁴ So shall the Khmer Rouge be always remembered, even in their final days.

Interestingly enough are recent reports from the Cambodian capitol, Phnom Penh, indicating disturbing graffiti on the walls throughout the city. The graffiti reads, over and over again, “LON NOL,” “LON NOL.” Some prognosticators predict this as an omen—a resurrection of the Lon Nol years of the early 1970’s era. Lon Nol a previous commander-in-chief of the armed forces in 1960 was also became Prime Minister in 1966. He was forced to resign in 1967 and was recalled to office in 1969. In 1970 he led the military overthrow of the government when Prince Sihanouk was vacationing in Paris. In 1972,

Lon Nol proclaimed himself the president of Cambodia. However he was unable to withstand the Khmer Rouge rebel forces, fled the country, and subsequently lived in exile in Hawaii and in California. He died in 1985 in Hawaii.

Back to the graffiti—is it saying the people want overthrow of the new 1993 UNTAC endorsed government of half FUNCINPEC and half CPP? Is this active, or subliminal rebellion—an offshoot of lessons learned in the largest Cambodian community in the US in Long Beach, California and subsequently now brought back to Cambodia? Is this the work of “kids” come home, “kids” who fled the country with their parents rather than face extinction? So here it is 1996, or 1997, or 1998, does the use of a year designation *really* make a difference to Cambodia today?

Subsequent to the elections in May 1993 and prior to the vast influx of United Nations personnel, Phnom Penh and the surrounding countryside were basically peaceful. Discussions with numerous UNMOs indicate that even traffic in Phnom Penh, as of March 1992, was still mostly cyclos, bicycles, and ox carts. By the time the UN’s 8,000 new Toyota Land Cruisers and Nissan Pick-ups arrived, they were already competing with numerous numbers of Mercedes 500 sedans. On one hand you have luxury cars, yet no recognizable dealerships or repair shops. Yet you can fill your tank up for the equivalent of 50 cents US per gallon either from a fire-breathing dragon on a barrel marked “Continental Indochine” or by the liter from refilled roadside Fanta or Coke bottles.

No doubt about it, the UN put on a successful election. But it is still too early to conclude that Cambodia has, proverbially, gotten the government it deserves? Nevertheless, the state of the country a few years after the UNTAC departure is a salutary

reminder of the limitations of multilateral attempts to in effect fast track the socio-political reengineering of a nation-state. Although UNTAC did much more than hold an election and leave, fundamental political transformation must come not from the UN but from Cambodians themselves.⁵

But UN “good doing” also upset the economy both from a monetary and psychological standpoint. The average UN Military Observer and the CIVPOL were paid \$160 per day—only \$40 *less* than the average Cambodian was making in a year! At the time of the UN arrival, the Khmer Rouge was relegated to their own specific and villager sympathetic areas and was able to co-exist with their villagers. The whole village was Khmer Rouge, in these stronghold areas of KR influence. Villages such as Pailin, Siem Reap, Battambang, Sissiphon, and Banty Meanchay existed this way. The very killers who decimated Cambodian society protected the villagers. UN presence kicked a beehive of activity and emotions in Cambodia. For example, the US dollar took over the place of the Cambodian Reil. Cambodians did not want to recognize their own currency, the reil. There was a wave of new business activity throughout the country. A lot of small legitimate businesses failed right after the UN left. Moms and pops straight out of Long Beach, California owned many shops and restaurants. The UN ‘lost’ over 850 of their prize white vehicles, mostly Toyota Land Cruisers, in the final months of the UNTAC mission. The locals blamed the Khmer Rouge but personal investigations found the majority of the vehicles in the hiding places of newly elected officials or reported traveling down Highway One toward Ho Chi Minh City. These Toyotas are now lost on the new Vietnamese economy forever.

Things became very active due to the influx of money that came into the hands of the Cambodian military just prior to UN departure. The World Bank “donated” over \$100 million US dollars to pay the soldiers who had not been paid by their own government for over six months.

Today, things have settled down in Cambodia in many ways. Cambodia will never, ever be what it was, but is that really progress? There are companies from other Southeast Asian nations such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore bidding against each other to put \$100 night rooms in the shadow of the seventh wonder of the world, Angkor Wat. Is this right? Who in the new Cambodian government is allowing this to happen?

More than anything, the forced democracy that Cambodia accepted has jolted the country into a mindset of modern reality. The same critics who decry the gang activity alive today in Cambodia have no solution to solve gang activity here in America. The election year anti-tobacco rhetoric has forced cigarette manufacturers to turn their marketing skills to places like Cambodia. Forget that the average life span for an adult Cambodian is only 50 years. Beer manufacturers are also on the inside track with overseas breweries looking for footholds in Cambodia’s lucrative market. Also, forget that only 20 percent of urban dwellers and 12 percent of the rural population have access to reliable water on a daily basis.

Drug crossroads, cheap prostitutes, and gang activity all welcomed Cambodia to the New World of the 1990s. These events will not change. Cambodia will not overnight, or hopefully, ever, become a Las Vegas or Atlantic City vacation spot. The fact is that Cambodia will never again regain the quaint status of being the “Paris of Indochina” that it was during the 1950’s either.

In his book, *Out Of Control*, Zbigniew Brzezinski lists twenty of America's shortcomings or domestic challenges that include the main problems or dilemmas currently besetting America.⁶ One could look at the list and substitute "Cambodia" for "America." Almost the same basic dilemmas requiring some degree of redress constitute, in effect, the agenda for [Cambodia's] renewal and for the effective reaffirmation of [Cambodia's] capacity to exercise sustained global [partnership or acceptance].⁷

Of the twenty items cited by Brzezinski, "indebtedness, industrial noncompetitiveness, a truly parasitic obsession with litigation, the massive propagation of moral corruption by the visual media, the emergence of potentially divisive multiculturalism, and an increasingly pervasive sense of spiritual emptiness,"⁸ really do not fully fit the Cambodia of today (yet). So basically, 14 of 20 factors greatly affect both a world superpower like America and an emerging third world country like Cambodia. Indebtedness and industrial noncompetitiveness do not fully affect Cambodia because she is still emerging into any type of economic foothold. There appears to be no obsession with litigation because there is still basically no law. The UN was unable to establish a recognized body of legislation or litigation. In fact, UNTAC, in its final days, set up an administrative review board to attempt to close out all legal cases which could possibly be brought against the UN. These cases included manslaughter, vehicular homicide, drunk driving, damage to and destruction of property, and child support cases involving children born to UNTAC personnel out of wedlock.⁹

Without going into detail, the remainder of the factors that beset America today also plagues an emerging Cambodia. These dilemmas include: a trade deficit, low savings and investment, low productivity growth rates, inadequate health care, poor-quality secondary

education, a deteriorating social infrastructure and widespread urban decay, a greedy wealthy class, a deepening race and poverty problem, widespread crime and violence, the spread of a massive drug culture, the inbreeding of social hopelessness, the profusion of sexual license, a decline in civic consciousness, and the emerging of gridlock in the political system.¹⁰ As Brzezinski notes, the above list deliberately focuses on factors needing redress if America (and it may be added, Cambodia) is to remain globally vital and appealing.

Another external factor concerning Cambodia today is membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Currently, the seven ASEAN nations of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam are rich in natural resources and possess a talented, hard-working population and with market-oriented development policies.¹¹ With Cambodia's recently conferred MFN, it seems natural that Cambodia would seek to gain ASEAN status and partnership. However, in August 1996, Cambodia's King Norodom Sihanouk made it clear he opposes Cambodia's bid to become a full member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.¹² Sihanouk went on to say, "In my opinion, a neutral country must not join an international association like NATO or ASEAN."¹³ By remaining neutral, Sihanouk says, "...Cambodia will live in peace with its neighbors, trade with everyone as equal partners, and without having to comply with the discipline of a group of associated states."¹⁴ Perhaps more strongly, Sihanouk believes Cambodia's neutrality "will only exist on paper" the day it joins ASEAN.¹⁵

Cambodia is like a moving train, but in reality is that train being steered by the personalities of a modern economic society and a government that says it is rooted in

democracy? The political bottom line in this country continues to be that things are still an improvement over the Khmer Rouge years, and better and better than anyone dared hope for in the uncertain years before the United Nations supervised elections of 1993.¹⁶ Another factor for stability is that despite the messy political and security situation, Cambodian citizens can still make a living. Good luck, Cambodia, as you face the elections of 1998 and the period beyond the elections. Remember, your past cannot be changed, but as a nation you can shape your future.¹⁷

Notes

¹Trevor Findlay, *Cambodia, The Legacy and Lessons of UNTAC*, SIPRI Research Report No. 9, (Oxford University Press, 1995), 161.

²Ibid.

³ Associated Press, "Hard-line KR Reported to be Killing Defector's Kin," *The Nation*, (Bangkok, Thailand), 8 March 1997.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 170.

⁶Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out Of Control*, (New York.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 103-107.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Personal observations. The author worked these cases for a month in September 1993, prior to leaving the UNTAC mission.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹U.S. Department of State, "Fact Sheet: Association of Southeast Asian Nations," *The DISAM Journal* 15, no. 2 (Winter, 1992/93): 62-64.

¹²Houn-Nam Ing, ed., *CAMNEWS*, on-line, Internet, 21 August 1996, Sihanouk Opposes Cambodia Joining ASEAN Alliance, <http://www.engr.cswb.edu/~hing/>.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, *Regional Outlook, Southeast Asia, 1995-96*, (Singapore, .: Prime Packaging Industries Pte Ltd., 1995), 24-26; 61-63.

¹⁷Ibid.

Glossary

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ANKI	<i>Armee Nationale pour un Kampuchea Independent</i> (National Army of Independent Kampuchea)
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
BLDP	Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party
BP	Bangkok Post
CivPol	Civilian Police
CMAC	Cambodian Mine Action Team
CPAF	Cambodian People's Armed Forces
CPP	Cambodian Peoples Party
DK	Democratic Kampuchea (The Khmer Rouge)
FANK	Forces Armees Nationales Khmeres (Khmer National Armed Forces)
FUNCINPEC	<i>Front Uni National Pour Un Cambodge Independent, Neutre, Pacifique, et Cooperatif</i> (United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Co-operative Cambodia)
FUNK	Front Uni National du Kampuchea (National United Front of Kampuchea)
GAO	US General Accounting Office
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICORC	International Committee on the Reconstruction of Cambodia
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
KHMER KROM	Ethnic Khmer born and raised in southern Vietnam.
KPNLAF	Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces 1972-1975.
KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front
KR	<i>Khmers Rouges</i> (Khmer Rouge); (both a political and military organization)

MMWG	Mixed Military Working Group
MOULINAKA	Mouvement de Liberation National du Kampuchea
MFN	Most Favored Nation (status)
MP	Military Police
NADK	National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PDK	Party of Democratic Kampuchea
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
PVO	Private Voluntary Organization
RCAF	Royal Cambodian Armed Forces
SNC	Supreme National Council
SOC	State of Cambodia
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNAMIC	United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMO	United Nations Military Observer
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group (Namibia)
UNV	United Nations Volunteer
WAT	A Buddhist Temple, (the most famous complex is Angkor Wat)
WHO	World Health Organization

Ankgar. "The Organization." Term used by Cambodian communists and others to refer to the ruling authorities in communist-controlled areas before 1975.

MOULINAKA. A political party, originally a military resistance group allied with FUNINCPEC

OXFAM. Voluntary relief organization that since 1979 has emphasized reconstruction and development of Cambodia's agriculture and economy.

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